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The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press said the government made efforts from 1981 to the present to invade editorial privacy, restrict access to government information and impose prior restraint on news stories.

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Jane Kirtley, executive director of the reporters committee, said the action is part of a pattern within the administration and may be part of a news media intimidation campaign.

"There is a trend that the administration has shown a greater desire to keep government information secret," Kirtley said. Intimidating the media is the "next best thing" to actual legal action, she said, citing more than 75 administration actions documented by her group of efforts to suppress the news media.

"The Justice Department's articulated position in the past has been that it is reluctant to take action," she said. "I would hope they would not consider this to be the right case" to prosecute.

Two top officials, one at the State Department and another at the Pentagon, have been dismissed recently for passing classified information to reporters.

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-A White House complaint in February against ABC News for allowing a Soviet reporter prime time air time to discuss Reagan's televised speech on defense spending and the budget.

-A Justice Department memorandum in February supporting use of executive privilege to keep records of President Nixon secret.

-NASA in January impounding film of news organizations covering the fatal Challenger launch.

-Reagan in November requiring all government employees and contractors with high-level security clearances to submit to lie detector tests.